

DISCUSSION WITH CRUX (TROTSKY) ON THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM

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(This document records the discussion between Trotsky in exile in Mexico and leaders of the US Socialist Workers Party\, which demonstrates the high tension of the period, marked by the rise to power of fascism in Italy and Germany following the defeat of the anti-fascist Franco forces in the Spanish Civil War; all amidst the ominous preparations for World War 2 which broke out one year later as Hitler's Nazi storm-stroopers invaded Poland -- Web Ed..)

Crux (Trotsky): The significance of the program is the significance of the party. The party is the vanguard of the class. The party is formed by selection from the most conscious, most advanced, most devoted elements and the party can play an important historical political role not in direct relation to its numerical strength. It can be a small party and play a great part. For example, in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, the Bolsheviks fraction had not more than 10,000 members, the Mensheviks 10,000 to 12,000 -- that is the maximum. At that time they belonged to the same party, so that the party as a whole had not more than 20,000 to 22,000 workers.

The party guided the Soviets throughout the whole country thanks to correct policy and to cohesion. It can be objected that the difference between the Russians and the Americans, or any other old capitalist country, was that the Russian proletariat was a totally fresh, virgin proletariat without any tradition of trade unions, conservative reformism. It was a young, fresh, virgin working class which needed direction and looked for this direction, and in spite of the fact that the party as a whole had not more than 20,000 workers, this party guided two to three million workers in the fight.

Now, what is the party? In what does the cohesion consist? This cohesion is a common understanding of the events, of the tasks, and this understanding — that is the program of the party. Just as modern workers more than the barbarian (primitive) cannot work without tools so in the party the program is the instrument. Without the program every worker must improvise his tool, find improvised tools, and one contradicts another. Only when we have the vanguard organized upon the basis of common conceptions then can we act.

One can say that we didn't have a program until this day. Yet we acted. But this program was formulated under different articles, different motions, etc. In this sense the draft program doesn't presage a new invention, it is not the writing of one man. It is the summation of collective work up until today. But such a summation is absolutely necessary in order to give to the comrades an idea of the situation, a common understanding. Petty bourgeois anarchists, and intellectuals are afraid to subscribe to giving a party common ideas, a common attitude. In opposition they wish moral programs. But for us this program is the result of common experience. It is not imposed upon anybody for whoever joins the party does so voluntarily.

I believe it is important in this connection to underline what we mean by freedom in contradiction to necessity. It is very often a petty bourgeois conception that we should have a free individuality. It is only a fiction, an error. We are not free. We have no free will in the sense of metaphysical philosophy. When I wish to drink a glass of beer I act as a free man but I don't invent the need for beer. That comes from my body. I am only the executor. But insofar as I understand the needs of my body and can satisfy them consciously then I have the sensation of freedom; freedom through understanding the necessity. Here the correct understanding of the necessity of my body is the only real freedom given to animals in any question and man is an animal. The same holds true for the class. The program for the class cannot fall from heaven. We can arrive only at an understanding of the necessity. In one case it was my body, in the other it is the necessity of society. The program is the articulation of the necessity, that we learned to understand, and since the necessity is the same for all members of the class, we can reach a common understanding of the tasks, and the understanding of this necessity is the program.

We can go further and say that the discipline of our party must be very severe because we are a revolutionary party against a tremendous bloc of enemies conscious of their interests, and now we are attacked not only by the bourgeoisie but by the Stalinists, the most venomous of the bourgeois agents. Absolute discipline is necessary but it must come from common understanding. If it is imposed from without it is a yoke. If it comes from understanding it is an expression of personality, but otherwise it is a yoke. Then discipline is an expression of my free individuality. It is not opposition between personal will and the party because I entered by my free will. The program too is on this basis and this program can be upon a sure political and moral basis only if we understand it very well.

The draft ("*transitional*" --*Web Ed.*) program is not a complete program. We can say that in this draft program there are things which are lacking and there are things which by their nature don't belong to the program. Things which don't belong to the program are the comments. This program contains not only slogans but also comments and polemics against the adversaries. But it is not a complete program. A complete program should have a theoretical expression of the modern capitalist society in its imperialist stage. The reasons of the crisis, the growth of unemployed, and so on; and in this draft this analysis is briefly summarized only in the first chapter because we have written about these things in articles, books, and so on. We will write more and better. But for practical purposes what is said here is enough because we are all of the same opinion.

The beginning of the program is not complete. The first chapter is only a hint and not a complete expression. Also the end of the program is not complete because we don't speak here about the social revolution, about the seizure of power by insurrection, the transformation of the capitalist society into the dictatorship, the dictatorship into the socialist society. This brings the reader only to the doorstep. It is a program for action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution. And from the practical point of view what is now the most important is how can we guide the different strata of the proletariat in the direction of the social revolution. I have heard that now the New York

comrades are beginning to organize circles with the purpose of not only studying and criticizing the draft program but also elaborating the ways and means in order to present the program to the masses and I believe that it is the best method which our party can utilize.

The program is only the first approximation. It is too general in the sense in which it is presented to the international conference in the next period. It expresses the general tendency of development in the whole world. We have here a short chapter devoted to the semi-colonial and colonial countries. We have here a chapter devoted to the fascist countries, a chapter on the Soviet Union and so on. It is clear that the general characteristics of the world situation are common because they are all under the pressure of the imperialist economy, but every country has its peculiar conditions and real live politics must begin with these peculiar conditions in each country and even in each part of the country. That is why a very serious approach to the program is the first duty of every comrade in the United States.

There are two dangers in the elaboration of the program. The first is to remain on general abstract lines and to repeat the general slogan without real connection with the trade unions in the locality. That is the direction of sectarian abstraction. The other danger is the contrary, to adapt too much to the local conditions, to the specific conditions; to lose the general revolutionary line. I believe that in the United States the second danger is the more immediate. I remember it most especially in the matter of militarization, armed pickets, etc. Some comrades were afraid that it is not real for the workers, etc.

In the last few days I read a French book written by an Italian worker about the rise of Fascism in Italy. The writer is opportunistic. He was a Socialist, but it is not his conclusions which are interesting but the facts which he presents. He gives the picture of the Italian proletariat in 1920-1921 especially. It was a powerful organization. They had 160 socialist parliamentary deputies. They had more than one-third of the communities in their hands, the most important sections of Italy were in the hands of the socialists, the center of the power of the workers. No capitalist could hire or fire without union consent and this applied to agricultural workers as well as industrial.

It seemed to be 49% of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the reaction of the small bourgeoisie, the demobilized officers was terrible against this situation. Then the author tells how they organized small bands under the guidance of officers and sent them in buses in every direction. In cities of 10,000 in the hands of the Socialists thirty organized men came into the town, burned up the municipality, burned the houses, shot the leaders, imposed on them the conditions of working for capitalists; then they went elsewhere and repeated the same in hundreds and hundreds of towns, one after the other. With terrible terror and these systematic acts they totally destroyed the trade unions and thus became bosses of Italy. They were a tiny minority.

The workers declared a general strike. The Fascists sent their buses and destroyed every local strike and with a small organized minority wiped out the workers'

organizations. After this came elections and the workers under the terror elected the same number of deputies. They protested in parliament until it was dissolved. That is the difference between formal and actual power. All the deputies were sure that they would have power, yet this tremendous movement with its spirit of sacrifice was smashed, crushed, abolished by some 10,000 fascists well-organized with a spirit of sacrifice and good military leaders.

In the United States it might be different but the fundamental tasks are the same. I read about the tactics of Hague. It is a rehearsal of a Fascist overthrow. He represents small bosses who became infuriated because the crisis deepened. He has his gang which is absolutely unconstitutional. This is very very contagious. With the deepening of the crisis it will spread all over the country and Roosevelt who is a very very good Democrat will say, "Perhaps it is the only solution."

It was the same in Italy. They had a minister who invited the Socialists. The Socialists refused. He admitted the Fascists. He thought he could balance them against the Socialists, but they smashed the minister too. Now I think the example of New Jersey is very important. We should utilize everything, but this especially. I will propose a special series of articles on how the Fascists became victorious. We can become victorious the same way but we must have a small armed body with the support of the big body of workers. We must have the best discipline, organized workers, defense committees, otherwise we will be crushed and I believe that our comrades in the United States don't realize the importance of this question. A Fascist wave can spread in two or three years and the best workers' leaders will be lynched in the worst possible way like the Negroes in the South. I believe that the terror in the United States will be the most terrible of all. That is why we must begin very modestly, that is, with defense groups but it should be launched immediately.

Question: How do we go about launching the defense groups practically?

Crux: It is very simple. Do you have a picket line in a strike? When the strike is over we say we must defend our union by making this picket line permanent.

Question: Does the party itself create the defense group with its own members?

Crux: The slogans of the party must be placed in quarters where we have sympathizers and workers who will defend us. But a party cannot create an independent defense organization. The task is to create such a body in the trade unions. We must have these groups of comrades with very good discipline, with good cautious leaders not easily provoked because such groups can be provoked easily. The main task for the next year would be to avoid conflicts and bloody clashes. We must reduce them to a minimum with a minority organization during strikes, during peaceful times. In order to prevent fascist meetings it is a question of the relationship of forces. We alone are not strong, but we propose a united front.

Hitler explains his success in his book. The Social-Democracy was extremely powerful. To a meeting of the Social-Democracy he sent a band with Rudolf Hess. He says that at the end of the meeting his thirty boys evicted all the workers and they were incapable of opposing them. Then he knew he would be victorious. The workers were only organized to pay dues. No preparation at all for other tasks. Now we must do what Hitler did except in reverse. Send forty to fifty men to dissolve the meeting. This has tremendous importance. The workers become steeled, fighting elements. They become trumpets. The petty-bourgeoisie think, these are serious people. Such a success! This has tremendous importance as so much of the populace is blind, backward, oppressed, they can be aroused only by success. We can only arouse the vanguard but this vanguard must then arouse the others. That is why I repeat it is a very important question. In Minneapolis where we have very skilled powerful comrades we can begin and show the entire country.

I believe that even these enigmatic murders of Corcoran and Brown (*two leading militants of the important Trotskyist-led 1937 Minneapolis Teamsters' strike, described in "Teamster Power" by Teamster strike strategist, later SWP leader, Farrell Dobbs, Monad Press, New York -- ed.*) can be used for this. I believe that it would be useful to discuss a little this part of the draft which is not sufficiently developed in our text. It is the general theoretical part.

In the last discussion I remarked that the theoretical part of the program as a general analysis of society is not given completely in this draft but is replaced by some short hints. On the other side it does not contain the parts dealing with the revolution, the dictatorship, and the construction of society after the revolution. Only the transitory period is covered. We have repeated many times that the scientific character of our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society. The mentality can be backward; then the political task of the party is to bring the mentality into harmony with the objective facts, to make the workers understand the objective task. But we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality of the workers; the mentality, the mood is a secondary factor — the prime factor is the objective situation. That is why we have heard these criticisms or these appreciations that some parts of the program do not conform to the situation.

Everywhere I ask what should we do? Make our program fit the objective situation or the mentality of the workers? And I believe that this question must be put before every comrade who says that this program is not fit for the American situation. This program is a scientific program. It is based on an objective analysis of the objective situation. It cannot be understood by the workers as a whole. It would be very good if the vanguard would understand it in the next period and that they would then turn and say to the workers, "You must save yourselves from fascism."

What do we understand by objective situation? Here we must analyze the objective conditions for a social revolution. These conditions are given in the works of Marx-

Engels and remain in their essence unchanged today. First, Marx one time said that no one society leaves its place until it totally exhausts its possibilities. What does this signify? That we cannot eliminate a society by subjective will, that we cannot organize an insurrection like the Blanquists (*anarchists -- Ed.*) What do "possibilities" signify? That a "society cannot leave?"

So long as society is capable of developing the productive forces and make the nation richer it remains strong, stable. That was the condition with slave society, with feudal, and with capitalist society. Here we come to a very interesting point which I analyzed previously in my introduction to the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels waited for a revolution during their lifetime. Especially in the years 1848-1850 did they expect a social revolution. Why? They said that the capitalist system based on private profit had become a brake upon the development of the productive forces. Was this correct? Yes and no.

It was correct in the sense that if the workers had been capable of meeting the needs of the 19th century and seizing power, the development of the productive forces would have been more rapid and the nation richer. But given that the workers were not capable, the capitalist system remained with its crisis, etc. Yet the general line ascended. The last war (1914-1918) was a result of the fact that the world market became too narrow for the development of the productive forces and each nation tried to repulse all the others and to seize the world market for its own purposes. They could not succeed and now we see that capitalist society enters into a new stage. Many say it was a result of the war, but the war was a result of the fact that the society had exhausted its possibilities.

The war was only an expression of its inability to further expand. We have after the war the historic crisis becoming deeper and deeper. Capitalist development everywhere was prosperity and crisis but the summation of the crises and prosperity was an ascendancy. Beginning with the war we see the cycles of crisis and prosperity forming a declining line. It signifies now that this society exhausted totally its inner possibilities and must be replaced by a new society or the old society will go into barbarism just as the civilization of Greece and Rome because they had exhausted their possibilities and no class could replace them.

That is the question now and especially in the United States. The first requisite now for a new society is that the productive forces must be sufficiently developed in order to give birth to a higher. Are the productive forces sufficiently developed for this? Yes, they were developed sufficiently in the 19th century -- not as well as now, but sufficiently. Now especially in the United States it would be very easy for some good statistician to prove that if the American productive forces were unleashed that even now today they could be doubled or tripled. I believe that our comrades should make such statistical survey.

The second condition -- there must be a new progressive class which is sufficiently numerous and economically influential in order to impose its will upon society. This class is the proletariat. It must be the majority of the nation or must have

the possibility to lead the majority. In England the working class is the absolute majority. In Russia it was a minority but it had the possibility to lead the poor peasants. In the United States it is at least half of the population but it has the possibility to lead the farmers.

The third condition is the subjective factor. This class must understand its position in society and have its own organizations. That is the condition which is now lacking from the historic point of view. Socially it is not only possible but an absolute necessity in the sense that it is either socialism or barbarism. That is the historical alternative.

We mentioned in the discussion that Mr. Hague is not some stupid old man who imagines some medieval system exists in his town. He is an advance scout of the American capitalist class.

Jack London wrote a book, *The Iron Heel*. I recommend it now. It was written in 1907. At that time it seemed a terrible dream but now it is absolute reality. He gives the development of the class struggle in the United States with the capitalist class retaining power through terrible repressions. It is the picture of the fascism. The ideology he gives even corresponds with Hitler. It is very interesting.

In Newark the Mayor begins to imitate Hague and they are all inspired by Hague and by the big bosses. It is absolutely certain that Roosevelt will observe that now in the crisis he can do nothing with democratic means. He is not a fascist as the Stalinists claimed in 1932. But his initiative will be paralyzed. What can he do? The workers are dissatisfied. The big bosses are dissatisfied. He can only maneuver until the end of his term and then say goodbye. A third term for Roosevelt is absolutely excluded. (*As it turned out, Roosevelt was re-elected, largely because of the outbreak of World War 2 in September 1939 -- Ed.*)

The imitation of the Newark mayor has tremendous importance. In two or three years you can have a powerful fascist movement of American character. What is Hague? He has nothing to do with Mussolini or Hitler, but he is an American fascist. Why is he aroused? Because the society can no longer be run on (by) democratic means. It would be of course impermissible to fall into a hysteria. The danger of the working class being out-run by events is indisputable, but we can combat this danger only by energetic, systematic development of our own activity under adequate revolutionary slogans and not by fantastic efforts to spring over our own heads.

Democracy is only the rule of big bosses. We must well understand what Lundberg showed in his book, that 60 families govern the United States. But how? By democratic means up until today. They are a small minority surrounded by middle classes, petty bourgeoisie, workers. They must have the possibility of interesting the middle classes in this society. They must not be desperate. The same holds true for the workers. At the least for the higher strata. If they are opposed they can break the revolutionary possibilities of the lower strata, and this is the only way of working democracy.

The democratic regime is the most aristocratic way of ruling. It is possible only to (in) a rich nation. Every British democrat has nine or ten slaves working in the colonies. The antique Greek society was a slave democracy. The same in a certain sense can be said today of British democracy, Holland, France, Belgium. The United States have no direct colonies but they have Latin America and the whole world is a sort of colony for the United States, not to speak about appropriating the richest continent and developing without a feudal tradition. It is a historically privileged nation but the privileged capitalist nations differ from the most "pariah" capitalist nations only from the point of view of delay. Italy, the poorest of the great capitalist nations became the first fascist. Germany became the second because Germany has no colonies or rich subsidiary countries and on this poor base exhausted all the possibilities and the workers could not replace the bourgeoisie.

Now it is the turn of the United States even before Great Britain or France. The duty of our party is to seize every American worker and shake him ten times so he will understand what the situation is in the United States. That it is not a conjunctural crisis but a social crisis. Our party can play a very great role. What is difficult for a young party in a very thick atmosphere of previous traditions, hypocrisy, is to launch a revolutionary slogan. "It is fantastic," "not adequate in America," but it is possible that this will change by the time you launch the revolutionary slogans of our program. Somebody will laugh. But revolutionary courage is not only to be shot but to support the laughter of stupid people who are in the majority. But when one of them is beaten by Hague's gang he will think it is good to have a defense committee and his ironic attitude will change.

Question: Isn't the ideology of the workers a part of the objective factors?

Crux: For us a small minority this whole thing is objective, including the mood of the workers. But we must analyze and classify those elements of the objective situation which can be changed by our paper (*our journal The Militant --Ed.*) and those which cannot be changed. That is why we say that the program is adapted to the fundamental stable elements of the objective situation and the task is to adapt the mentality of the masses to these objective factors. To adapt the mentality is a pedagogical task. We must be patient, etc. The crisis of society is given as the base of our activity. The mentality is the political arena of our activity. We must change it. We must give a scientific explanation of society, and clearly explain it to the masses. That is the difference between Marxism and reformism.

The reformists have a good smell for what the audience wants -- as Norman Thomas (*prominent moderate Socialist Party leader*) -- he gives them that. But that is not serious revolutionary activity. We must have the courage to be unpopular, to say "you are fools," "you are stupid," "they betray you," and every once in a while with a scandal launch our ideas with passion. It is necessary to shake the worker from time to time, to explain, and then shake him again — that all belongs to the art of propaganda. But it must be scientific, not bent to the moods of the masses. We are the most realistic

people because we reckon with facts which cannot be changed by the eloquence of Norman Thomas. If we win immediate success we swim with the current of the masses and that current is the revolution.

Question: Sometimes I think that our own leaders don't feel these problems.

Crux: Possibly it is two things. One is to understand, the other feel it with muscles, fibers. It is necessary now to be penetrated by this understanding that we must change our politics. It is a question not only for the masses but for the party. It is a question not only for the party but also for the leaders. We had some discussions, some differences. It is impossible to come to the position at the same time. There are always frictions. They are inevitable and even necessary. It was the reason for this program, to provoke this discussion.

Question: How much time should we allow for this discussion among the leaders?

Crux: It is very difficult to say. It will depend on many factors. We cannot allow *(a)* too great deal of time. We must now accomplish this new orientation. It is a new and an old *(challenge)*. It is based on all past activity but now it opens a new chapter. In spite of errors, frictions, and fights, now a new chapter opens and we must mobilize all our forces upon it in *(a)* more energetic attitude. What is important, when the program is definitely established, is to know the slogans very well and to maneuver them skillfully so that in every part of the country everyone uses the same slogans at the same time. Three thousand can make *(an)* impression *(on)* fifteen thousand or fifty thousand.

Question: Comrades may agree abstractly to this program but do we have experienced comrades to carry out slogans in the masses? They agree abstractly but what can I do with the backward workers in my union?

Crux: Our party is a party of the American working class. You must remember that a powerful proletarian movement not to speak of a powerful proletarian revolution has not occurred in the United States. In 1917 we didn't have the possibility to win without 1905. My generation was very young. During 12 years we had a very good chance to understand our defeats and correct them and to win. But even then we lost again to the new bureaucrats. That is why we cannot see whether our party will directly lead the American working class to victory. It is possible that the American workers, who are patriotic, whose standard of living is too high will have rebellions, strikes. On one side Hague, the other Lewis (*John L., the iconic miners' union leader and champion of the CIO -- Ed.*) That can last for a long period, years and years, and, during this time our people will steel themselves, become more sure of themselves, and the workers will say, "They are the only people capable of seeing the path." Only war produces war heroes. For the beginning we have excellent elements, very good men, seriously educated, a good staff, and not a small staff. In this more general sense I am totally optimistic. Then I believe that the change in the mentality of the American workers will come at

very speedy rhythm. What to do? Everybody is disquieted, looking for something new. It is very favorable for revolutionary propaganda.

We must remember not only the aristocratic elements but the poorest elements. The cultivated American workers have a plus and a minus such as English sports (*baseball being a derivative of England's cricket; football of rugger, etc. -- Ed.*). It is very good but also a device to demoralize (*distract?*) the workers. All the revolutionary energy was expended in sports. It was cultivated by the British, the most intelligent of the capitalist nations; sports should be in the hands of the trade unions as part of the revolutionary education. But you have a good part of the youth and women who are not rich enough for these things. We must have tentacles to penetrate everywhere into the deepest strata.

Question: I think the party has made great advances since the last convention. (*Likely a reference to the major pre-war dispute with the Burnham-Shactman faction within the SWP over defence of the Russian Soviet state --Web Ed*)

Crux: A very important turn has been accomplished. Now it is necessary to give this weapon a concentrated action. General dispersed agitation doesn't penetrate into the minds of the uneducated. But if you repeat the same slogans, adapting them to the situation, then repetition which is the mother of teaching will act likewise in politics. Very often it happens not only with the intellectual but with a worker that he believes that everybody understands what he has learned. It is necessary to repeat with insistence, to repeat every day and everywhere. That is the task of the draft program -- to issue a homogeneous impression.

(end)